

CONGRESSMAN MICHAEL H. MICHAUD VOTES TO PROVIDE OVERDUE BENEFITS FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

Friday, May 21 2004

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Michael Michaud, Ranking Member of the House Veterans Affairs subcommittee on
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"Our country owes a great debt
to those who put their lives in harm's way for our freedom," said
Congressman Michaud. "And we know that the spouses of those we send
into battle make great sacrifices as well. That is why I will continue to fight
until the Survivor Benefit Plan actually becomes law."

This marks a significant victory
for military spouses in a bipartisan battle Congressman Michaud has fought
since coming to Congress. Congressman
Michaud is a cosponsor of H.R. 548, the Military Survivor Benefits
Improvement Act of 2003 and H.R. 3763, the Military Survivor Benefits
Improvement Act of 2004, to increase the minimum Survivor Benefit Plan basic
annuity for surviving spouses age 62 and older.
He has signed the discharge petition to bring the Military Survivor
Benefits Improvement Act to the floor and he has also introduced H.R. 1750 to
increase by \$250 per month the dependency and indemnity compensation payable to
the surviving spouse of a member of the Armed Services.

H.R. 4200 provides long overdue
retirement benefits for men and women in the armed services. Both parties
collaborated to include bipartisan provisions to end the Widow's Tax. Without
action, this tax will penalize over 200,000 elderly Americans over the next 10
years, and hundreds of thousands in future years. Over one million military
retirees anticipate that upon their death, their spouse will receive 55 percent
of their retirement benefit. But when the spouse reaches 62, the benefit drops
to 35 percent, forcing these widows to give up a substantial portion of their
benefits. The new provisions in the bill would begin to reduce the
penalty in the fall of 2005.

The bill also provides \$829.6 million for production of armored Humvees and \$358.2 million for Vehicle Add-On Armor Kits for the Army's truck fleet. According to a report commissioned by DOD, roughly one-fourth of U.S. combat deaths might have been prevented if there had been sufficient supplies of body armor and armored vehicles. The DOD bill also provides \$192 million for new fighting vehicles to transport troops to the battlefield and provide fire support, as well as \$400 million for new body armor.

"It is our responsibility to provide the resources our military personnel need to carry out their mission quickly, safely and effectively so that they can return home to us as quickly as possible," said Congressman Michaud. "This bill will provide them with the equipment and support they need to successfully complete their dangerous missions."

Finally, the DOD authorization bill includes a 3.5 percent across-the-board pay raise for members of the armed forces; an increase in the maximum amount of hardship duty pay from \$300 to \$750 per month; up to \$3,000 per month in income replacement payments for reservists away from their civilian jobs; and \$9.9 billion for troop and family housing, medical facilities, and schools for Department of Defense dependents.

This legislation will now go to conference with the Senate before returning to the House of Representatives for final passage.

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